DATE 9 May 83
FB PN 83-018

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[redacted] FB PN 83-018

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Press Note

USSR: CORRECTIVE LABOR POLICY CRITICIZED

Summary: A recent book review provides a rare glimpse into Soviet policy on the corrective labor system, highlighting problems and suggesting changes both in the law and in the structure of the corrective labor camps.

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A book by S. I. Dementyev, Incarceration: Criminal Law and Corrective Labor Aspects, is abstracted in the January/February 1983 issue of the official Soviet journal for works on state and law. According to the reviewer--and all the quotations below are taken from the review--Dementyev criticizes the Soviet legal and corrective labor process on the following points:

Punishment as a legitimate aim of corrective labor camps. Dementyev criticizes criminologists and legal theorists who reject punishment as a legitimate aim of corrective labor. "Punishment is the essence of corrective labor...and depends not only on the length of the sentence but also on the type of corrective labor institution, as well as on other factors: the location of the corrective labor institution, climatic conditions, the presence of the prisoner's relatives The Author rejects re-education, arguing that punishment in and of itself is "corrective."

Increasing the punitive aspects of incarceration and tying rehabilitation to labor performance. Dementyev urges a strengthening of "the punitive side of incarceration in strict regime camps [koloniya], where especially dangerous recidivists serve out their sentences, by means of lengthening the working day and decreasing the rate of pay for the prisoner's labor...." Dementyev also urges a toughening of the system of fines and a reduction in the variety of personal items allowed into the labor camps. He proposes that the criteria for judging a prisoner's rehabilitation be tied to the consistent performance of hard, useful labor.

Changing legal definitions. Dementyev urges the adoption of more precise legal definitions of "aggravating circumstances" and "petty demeanor" in Article 52 of the Criminal Code and proposes a toughening of the laws concerning "premeditated bodily harm, premeditated murder, the theft of personal property, hooliganism and certain other crimes."

Classifying camps by location and establishing a strict regime camp for women. "In addition, the author calls for the distribution of corrective

This note, by Sherman Garnett of FBIS Production Group, [redacted] contains information from the Soviet press.

Approved for Release
Date APR 1997

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Camp Violence. In recounting the biographies of several inmates and administrators, Shirobokov records instances of internal camp violence. The librarian Koroleva, for example, "had her head split open by 'the local children' [inmates]. It was a miracle she remained alive." Vandalism was common "before the arrival of the new administrator." At least two of the inmates resorted to self-mutilation to avoid labor. The inmate Shergin "asked for a razor blade from the authorities and while at class cut his wrist. They stopped the blood at the infirmary and punished him." Another juvenile, identified only as "Savage," swallowed a spoon to avoid work. Though Shirobokov is careful to speak of these incidents as long past or the work of an as yet unreformed inmate, he nevertheless leaves the reader feeling that the Irkutsk camp is an exceedingly violent place.

Juvenile Crime. Through the biographies of several youngsters, Shirobokov sketches a striking picture of juvenile crime in the USSR. Shergin, for example, was a member of a motorcycle and auto theft ring in Magadan; he eventually became part of a youth gang in Komsomolsk-na-Amur which was responsible for numerous "beatings and robberies" in a local park. Another inmate is described simply as "a murderer." Most are sentenced for "robbery, violence, theft, and malicious hooliganism." Shirobokov characterizes these youngsters as "sick, not criminal." He notes that a large portion of those incarcerated in Irkutsk must be treated for alcoholism. A majority of the inmates sentenced to three years or longer were raised by a mother alone, or by a mother and step-father. Often the parents of these children are themselves criminals or "parasites." Camp administrators and educators note with alarm the growing number of deliquents from "families that are extremely well off." One teacher complains that the feeling of "collective responsibility" once found in large families "has now been lost."

[A translation of Shirobokov's articles will appear in a future issue of the JPRS USSR Report: Political and Sociological Affairs.]

labor camps along clearly defined territorial lines, for example, strict regime camps should be located in far-off forested locations." This change would insure that prisoners sentenced to strict regime camps experience the added hardship of an isolated location and a difficult climate. Dmenetyev also recommends the establishment of a strict regime camp for women.

The review was attributed to I. L. Marogulova and published in the Soviet journal OBSHCHESTVENNYYE NAUKI V SSSR, SERIYA IV, GOSUDARSTVO I PRAVO. A translation will be published in the JPRS USSR Report: Political and Sociological Affairs.